FORMAL AND INFORMAL DISCRIMINATION OF INTERSECTIONAL WORKPLACE ROMANCES

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Formal and Informal Discrimination of Intersectional Workplace Romances

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Workplace romances (WRs) have been shown to produce negative outcomes for organizations, yet are steadily increasing in prevalence. Prior studies have looked into both the interpersonal and organizational implications of WRs; however, researchers have not fully investigated how these implications can be impacted by workplace discrimination. Thus, the present study seeks to propose a model of discrimination and incivility as it pertains to coworker involvement in a WR. Through an experimental, policy capturing design, we measured participant responses to manipulated WR scenarios on various workplace outcomes. Employed participants (n = 544) were asked to report their perceptions of two hypothetical organizational members of varying identities engaging in a relationship with each other. Variables were analyzed using a 2 (Interracial or Same-race) x 2 (Same-sex or Heterosexual) x 2 (Hierarchical or Lateral) design on the outcomes of perceived problem level, perceived level of competence, and preferred organizational action. We suggest that (H1) interracial, (H2) same-sex, and/or (H3) hierarchical workplace romances will be (a) perceived as more of a problem for the organization, (b) rated as less competent, and (c) given more severe organizational action than same-race, heterosexual, and/or lateral WRs. Relevant literature, significance of our findings, and future directions for research are all discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970's, researchers have been looking into the organizational implications of workplace romances. As time spent in the workplace has increased over the years, the prevalence of workplace romances has increased as well (Gauthier, Frank, & Furstenburg, 2005; Horan & Chory, 2013). Horan and Chory (2011) define a workplace romance (WR) as a "non-platonic relationship between two members of an organization in which sexual attraction is present, affection is communicated, and both members recognize the relationship to be something more than just professional and platonic" (pp. 565). A number of studies have looked into how these WRs are perceived by their coworkers based on a number of factors which can result in a variety of interpersonal and performance related outcomes (Alder & Quist, 2014; Barratt & Nordstrom, 2011; Jones, 1999; Wilson, 2015). Prior research on WRs has often focused on the perceptions and outcomes of same-race, heterosexual relationships; however, literature is sparse concerning the implications of WRs including stigmatized identities within the relationship.

The workplace was recently referred to as a "natural dating service" (Jones, 1999) due to its inherent encouragement for employees to pursue romantic relationships with coworkers (Anderson & Hunsaker, 1985). This finding has been attributed to many causes including, but not limited to, (1) employees spending a majority of their available time working for their perspective organizations, both on and off the site and (2) employees find that they share similar interests and values with their organizational peers (OPs; Anderson & Hunsaker, 1985; Byrne, 1971). In addition to these findings, research on attraction in the workplace has shown that working in close proximity with others, harboring mutual attitudes about each other with another individual, and finding it easy to interact with another individual are all predictors of attraction (Byrne & Neuman, 1992; Salvaggio, Streich, Hopper, & Pierce, 2011). Another study proposes

that the increasing prevalence of WRs can be attributed to the influx of women in the workplace (Ford & McLaughlin, 1987; Powell & Foley, 1998; Warfield, Swartz, & Wood, 1987). Seeing as the number of Black and homosexual employees is rising as well (Deitch et al., 2003; Phillips, Ingram, Smith, & Mindes, 2003), this too could have implications for an increased number of stigmatized relationships in the workplace.

Taken together, research in this field is relevant to organizational well-being. As a whole, uninvolved coworkers and supervisors generally perceive WRs negatively in the context of the organization (Brown & Allgeier, 1996). Managers oftentimes resent these relationships out of fear for what negative outcomes they might incur upon uninvolved coworkers as well as the organization as a whole (Alder & Quist, 2014). Concurrent with these findings, an estimated 40% of managers hold negative perceptions towards employee dating (Brown & Allgeier, 1995); furthermore, a survey done by the Society for Human Resource Management in 2002 presented that an astounding 81% of HR professionals as well as 76% of executives describe WRs as "dangerous" (SHRM, 2002). Despite this resounding disapproval from management, another survey by the Society for Human Resource Management done in 1998 showed that the frequency of WRs has done nothing but increase or remain constant in years past among organizations in the United States (SHRM, 1998). Collectively, the increasing number of WRs and the inherent disdain towards those WRs from OPs raises important questions as to how stigmatized relationships fit into this finding. Workplace discrimination is still reported (Bergart, 2004; Deitch et al., 2003; Link & Phelan, 2001) and, as such, involvement in a WR could pose to be potentially dangerous for stigmatized individuals. Because of this, we see the implicit need for more research examining workplace romances.

Workplace Romance Outcomes

Quinn's seminal work on WRs in 1977 was one of the first to record implications of negative workplace outcomes. After deeming workplace romances as naturally desirable to pursue despite being perceived as deviant behavior in the workplace, Quinn theorized that these relationships being perceived as inappropriate is partially due to employee observation through the lens of the equity and justice theory (Adams, 1965; Rawls, 2009). This theory posits that employees assess their own cost and benefit experiences in the workplace in terms of ratio, and compare their own experiences to the experiences of other as a basis of workplace equality and justice. Since those involved in a WR are exchanging goods between each other, OPs perceive their relationship to be unequal and unjust compared to the cost and benefit of their own experiences. When this happens, OPs will perceive a WR as negative for workplace outcomes and will, in turn, produce coping strategies to inhibit this negative perception. In addition, the more negatively a WR is perceived, the greater then will be the coping strategies used to face it; thus, the more negatively a WR is perceived, the greater of a negative impact will be perceived by the OPs observing it. This theory draws on the cyclical nature of these negative perceptions and shows how dangerous of an issue to the organization a WR can be perceived to be. Stigmatized individuals already receive many barriers to workplace functioning and job advancement without their involvement in a WR (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Schneider, Hitlan, & Radhakrishnan, 2000). Because of this, they have to commit more energy than non-stigmatized coworkers in to reach the same level of organizational treatment. As such, OPs view the goods and services exchanged by a stigmatized individual's involvement in a WR as more unequal and unjust when compared to their own experiences.

Additional negative outcomes of WRs include the potential for distraction, increased gossip, increased hostility in a workgroup, distorted communications, decrease in team morale, decrease in workgroup productivity, increase in time spent decision making, and an increase of incivility directed towards those peers engaging in the WR (Anderson & Hunsaker, 1985; Jones, 1999; Mainiero, 1986). Along with these direct negative workplace outcomes, the presence of a WR has the potential to negatively impact the workplace in more indirect ways. OPs' negative perceptions towards their coworkers involved in a WR causes them to engage in avoidance behavior towards those involved members. This, in turn, leads to weakened interpersonal workplace interactions which are manifested by lower perceived group cohesion, insufficiencies in workgroup communication and a decrease in productivity and job satisfaction (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Dailey, 1978; Summers, Coffelt, & Horton, 1988). Given the negative connotation prescribed to stigmatized individuals, we can expect their involvement in a WR to exacerbate these negative outcomes.

Research shows that organizations have the potential to mold and shape employee norms by showing what behavior is perceived as tolerated or expected (Salvaggio et al., 2011). OPs have been shown to transfer negative perceptions they have towards WRs onto their organization (Alder & Quist, 2014). For example, an employee's perception of a particular WR as unprofessional would eventually lead them to perceive the entire organization as unprofessional; allowing those tolerated behaviors present in the organization to define that employee's perceived norms for the organization as a whole. Research has found that employees observing a WR in their organization begin to lower the set standard of their own perceived norms for the workplace (Brandl & Neyer, 2009). These negative perceptions being projected to the workgroup or organization as a whole have the potential for negative workplace outcomes including an

overall decrease in workgroup productivity and quality, reduced cooperation, decrease in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), and increased turnovers experienced by the organization, as well as lower job satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment experienced by the individuals (Hamill, Wilson, & Nisbett, 1980; Kahneman & Miller, 1986). As these outcomes manifest, employees perceiving the decline in organizational standards as a result of a WR may, in turn, perceive that WR as less competent as justification for the lowered standards. Stigmatized individuals may be at an even greater risk because their involvement in a WR has potential to attribute their partner with a connection to the stigma as well. As such, the negative perceptions directed towards the stigmatized individual participating in a WR can exacerbate the decline in accepted workplace standards and, in turn, may cause more salient negative workplace outcomes.

Cole's (2009) study on workplace romance and perceptions of fairness contributes evidence to the negative nature of WRs through accumulating only negative reports of WRs, without any positive effect reports. Powell and Foley (1998) emphasized the seriousness of WR to an organization by stating that beyond the negative implications of their presence to those involved, WRs also impact organizational performance. This highlights the risk associated with stigmatized individuals participating in WRs. People are uncomfortable in the presence of stigmatized individuals (Goffman, 1963), and, given that WRs are already perceived negatively without the involvement of stigmatized individuals, we can expect to see an additive effect in negative organizational outcomes when a stigmatized individual participates in a WR. Stigmatized individuals' involvement in a WR may exacerbate the overwhelming negative consequences presented by WRs in organizations.

Cole's (2009) research may not have produced any positive outcomes of WRs, but other research has. A number of studies highlight how the inclusion of WRs can elicit positive outcomes such as an increase in job satisfaction, organizational commitment, morale and motivation, creativity and innovation, as well as communication and cooperation (Biggs, Matthewman, & Fultz, 2012; Pierce & Aguinis, 2003). Following this, team-based organizations hosting a WR have been found to show improvements in cohesiveness, coordination, teamwork, and job performance, along with decreasing workplace tension (Anderson & Hunsaker, 1985; Quinn, 1977). While these positive implications seem to prove hopeful for stigmatized WRs, Mainiero (1986) stated that participation in a WR is unlikely to affect workplace outcomes when the WR contains members of equal statuses and commitment to their job is the same. However, this equal status is already hard to come by even when comparing any two same-race, heterosexual employees in a WR, so the general consensus remains that WRs are perceived negatively for workplace outcomes. It would seem then, if equality between employees in a WR predicts less of a problem for their organization, that a noticeable inequality between two participating members in a WR may, in turn, predict a noticeable problem for the organization. OPs may perceive a stigmatized coworker as having less social power than normative employees due to their stigmatizing characteristics and, as such, more saliently perceive their involvement in a WR as more negative.

All of this taken into account, it would seem that literature has done an ample job identifying the outcomes manifested by WRs; however, they do not explore diversity and its implications in enough of their studies. When WRs are already perceived negatively overall by OPs and supervisors (Brown & Allgeier, 1996), they raise unanswered questions about how these negative reactions differ based on the stigmatizing nature of certain relationships. We have

identified three types of stigmatized relationships that could be present in any workplace; interracial relationships, homosexual relationships, and supervisor/employee (power differential) relationships.

Stigmatizing Characteristics in the Workplace

"Stigma" is a term used to identify individual characteristics that majority members deem as unfavorable (Link & Phelan, 2001). Those characterized by stigma are often viewed as minority members as most people do not want to associate themselves with these unfavorable characteristics. Because of this, normative individuals report uncomfortable feelings when in the presence of stigmatized individuals. This, in turn, leads to avoidance, ostracism, and isolation of those stigmatized identities (Goffman, 1963). This has the potential to undermine the positive organizational behaviors expected by organization managers and policy makers seeing as these avoidance behaviors directly oppose organizational goals of teamwork and cooperation as well as society's trend towards acceptance (Bobo, 1998).

While the literature on WRs does not contain much examining stigmatized WRs, it does have ample information on the negative outcomes posed specifically for women in heterosexual workplace romance studies. It is easy to see that women experience WRs very differently than men do, both while in them and in the outcomes produced by their involvement (Dillard & Miller, 1988; Powell and Foley 1998; Quinn 1977). Women are twice as likely as men to lose their jobs after disclosing involvement in a WR (Quinn & Lees, 1984). When not terminated, negative emotions and attitudes elicited by women after the relationship were described as 'over-emotional' and 'unstable', whereas men's behavior was justified as 'coping' (Riach & Wilson, 2007). Overall, women are deemed as more likely to be involved in WRs to satisfy job motivations, and are perceived by peers as having less power to provide salient rewards in any

relationship they may find themselves in (Ibarra 1993). All of these reports implicate the idea that women are, in general, more negatively viewed by their involvement in WRs than men are. While these findings are not generalizable to the experiences of stigmatized individuals participating in WRs, they do highlight that individual characteristics cause people to experience WR differently. Powell and Foley (1998) explain that this issue of negative employee reactions has implications for not only women in WRs, but also for other stigmatized identities as well.

Festinger's (1962) theory of cognitive dissonance helps to explain why these stigmas predict negative outcomes to the people characterized by them. Employees experience 'dissonance' as a result of workplace conflict; a negative and uncomfortable feeling. Employees experiencing dissonance unconsciously act to reduce it. To overcome this conflict, people can either (*A*) change their own principles in order to reduce dissonance from future interactions by decreasing negative judgments or attitudes, (*B*) change the behavior that started the conflict, or (*C*) aligning themselves with those they agree with on the subject, and derogate those who do not in order to separate themselves from the target in question. The uncomfortable feelings manifested in employees by the presence of stigma can be attributed to dissonance. When facing this conflict, employees are unlikely to (*A*) change their own principles because observers are experiencing dissonance to begin with due to their preconceptions of the stigmatizing nature of the relationship and are therefore unlikely to change their own attitudes towards the stigma. They are also unlikely to (*B*) change their coworker's behavior because employees are unlikely to speak out and try to change the minds of those stigmatized individuals, especially given society's move towards acceptance. As a result, employees find themselves (*C*) aligning with like-minded individuals and acting out against stigmatized individuals. The following sections break down

our three target characteristics of race, sexual orientation, and organizational power as they pertain to stigmatized workplace romance functioning.

Socially Stigmatized WRs – Interracial and Same-sex WRs

Much like the increase in WRs was attributed to the increase of women in the workplace, organizations should expect a steady increase in interracial and same-sex WRs as a result of increasing diversity in the American workforce (Deitch et al., 2003; Powell & Foley, 1998). As much as our society would like to believe that discrimination and prejudice is disappearing, it would seem that such is not the case (Sanchez & Brock, 1996). Individuals characterized by a stigmatizing sexual orientation still face social and work barriers that prevent them from receiving social support from peers as well as slow their job advancement (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). While overt expressions of racism are becoming viewed more and more socially adverse, people are still uncomfortable in the presence of visible stigmas; therefore, racial prejudice has chosen to manifest in more subtle ways as opposed to abolishing altogether (Bobo, 1998). 'Modern racism' (McConahay, 1986), 'aversive racism' (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), and 'ambivalent racism' (Katz & Hass, 1988) are all examples of how majority members can believe themselves to be non-prejudiced while at the same time extending the presence of racism in the workplace (Brief & Barsky, 2000). These discriminatory acts also have implications for same-sex WRs because their stigma inherently becomes visible when they disclose their involvement with another peer of the same sex.

Whether subtle or overt, prejudice and discrimination towards race and sexual orientation is still prevalent in the workplace. Much like we used women's experience with discrimination as a comparison for other stigmatized identities, Swim, Hyers, Cohen, and Ferguson (2001) explained that, even when not experiencing explicit sexist events daily, the daily presence of

discrimination affects the psychological well-being of women leading them to increased anger and depression, as well as lower self-esteem. Deitch et al. (2003) agree with these statements and posit that these processes manifest themselves as negative emotions in the victim wherever prejudice is experienced (Miller and Kaiser, 2001). Another form of workplace discrimination, micro-aggression, has been identified as subtle discriminatory acts like avoidance, 'closed' communication, and a low willingness to assist the stigmatized individual (Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). Since these subtle actions are easier to produce in the organizational setting, their prevalence in the workplace has increased while their subtle nature has not decreased their damaging nature (Brief & Barsky, 2000). Deitch et al. (2003) propose that experiences with discrimination, regardless of their subtlety or overtness, perpetuate themselves as stressors in the stigmatized individual's life. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) describe a stressor as an encounter in one's life that negatively impacts their adaptive resources. As such, these individuals have to spend extra energy overcoming this encounter to re-adapt their psychological and emotional well-being (Deitch et al., 2003). All of this is evidence for not only the pervasive nature of discrimination in the workplace, but also for the need for additional research in the field of WR as it pertains to the effects of race and sexual orientation on negative workplace functioning. The available literature is unable to discern whether stigma's effect on WR involvement will have an additive effect such that the negative perceptions towards stigmatized individuals and towards WR involvement will compound, or a multiplicative effect such that the degree of stigma characterized by an individual will multiplicatively exacerbate the negative perceptions towards involvement in a WR. Either way, we propose that a stigmatized individual's involvement in a WR may implicate more negative organizational outcomes than WRs without stigmatized individuals.

In a study on coworker perceptions of WRs, Cole (2009) found that most employees report negative consequences from WRs; yet, also report management does not do enough to effectively deal with the issue. When faced with a negative experience that management does not handle, employees will want equity to be restored and for this negative experience to cease. Quinn's (1977) seminal study on WRs revealed that coworkers experiencing negative outcomes of these relationships will respond by either (a) acting out on the couple (ostracism, blackmail, incivility, etc) or (b) withdrawing from the organization (turnover or absenteeism). Either way, these are negative for healthy workplace functioning, and the desire to act out against the couple becomes increasingly salient as the negative outcomes experienced become more prevalent. The negative attitudes and beliefs OPs hold towards minority members may make it easier for the OP to justify acting out against them. As a result, stigmatized individuals may receive more incidences of negativity and incivility in the workplace due to their involvement in a WR.

In Giuffre and Williams' (1994) study on workplace romance and sexual harassment, they found that one non-stigmatized demographics' actions would be described as "flirtatious bantering", whereas the same behavior elicited by a different, stigmatized demographic was reported as sexual harassment. Quinn (1977) identified six managerial actions (no action, written warning, verbal reprimand, counseling, transfer, or termination) that organizations can take in response to the disclosure of a WR as they pertain to fairness. It was found that stricter workplace romance policies (verbal reprimand, written warning, transfer, and termination) were perceived to be fairer when the couple's performance was negatively affected or the romance was highly visible to peers. Taken together, these findings suggest that individual characteristics play a role in peer perceptions of WRs causing subjective evaluation in determining the fairness of what actions can be taken in response to the WR. This evidence suggests that management is

not as aware of WR impact as coworkers are, and that it may be easier for coworkers to prefer action be invoked than it is for managers to actually take it; however, when paired with the stigmatizing nature of interracial relationships, it is fair to assume supervisors may find it easier to enact more severe action that can result in harsher outcomes for the stigmatized individual. Due to these reasons, we hypothesize:

H1: Individuals within interracial workplace romances will be a) perceived as more of a problem for the organization, b) rated as less competent, and c) given more severe organizational actions.

H2: Individuals within same-sex workplace romances will be a) perceived as more of a problem for the organization, b) rated as less competent, and c) given more severe organizational actions.

The Effect of Differential Power Dynamic on Workplace Romances

Hierarchal power dynamic is not a typical characteristic grouped with stigma; however, the literature on hierarchical WRs shows resounding evidence of dissonance and the negative implications they incur. Hierarchical WRs, as opposed to lateral WRs, are relationships in which the two involved employees are at different organizational levels (Karl & Sutton, 2000; Pierce & Aguinis, 1997). These relationships have been found to be both more frequent, and more negatively impactful on workplace functioning than lateral WRs (Powell, 2001). Mainiero (1986) suggested that the negative repercussions of hierarchical WRs are more harmful to organizations than any lateral romance. Most prior research finds Hierarchical WRs to be more disruptive in nature and less tolerated by coworkers (Anderson & Hunsaker, 1985; Brown & Allgeier, 1996; Mainiero, 1989). At their core, these WRs undermine perceptions of procedural

and organizational justice due to the fact that they implicitly reflect a power imbalance for the organization in which they take place (Alder & Quist, 2014).

These unbalanced partnerships presented in the shape of WRs have been defined as 'power coalitions' by Mainiero (1986) and are described as unfairly distributing goods between those involved as well as sharing all information presented to either involved party. Jones (1999) explains the danger presented here when OPs begin partaking in 'information management', or the manipulation of information shared with the individual in beliefs that the information will be directly relayed to the individual's partner. People view these power coalitions as unfair and exploitative not only for their own concerns but for the person in the relationship with less power as well (Greenberg, 1987). Wilson (2015) used Lukes' (1986) three-dimensional model of power to explain the dangers of such a power difference in WRs. The first face of power, Issue, states that a person of power is able to change the behaviors of others using their power. The second, agenda, states that a person of power not only makes decisions in their organization, but also sets the schedule for decisions to be made. Finally, the third, manipulation, states that a person with the ability to control the rules causes people to accept their decisions as "right" without questions. The article explains that, in using the third face of power, the person in the relationship with the greater power in the organization is able to manipulate the rules and perceptions of not only their partner but to other employees as well. This manipulation inhibits conflict from arising and tricks the involved individual and observers into believing the romance should be considered harmless fun and not negative for workplace outcomes.

None of these negative workplace outcomes would be present without the WR itself; however, Dillard (1987) commented that the relationship itself is not entirely to blame. Powell and Foley (1998) claim that employees are quick to perceive injustices in their organizations that

may actually not be present. An observer-focused explanation of the harmful effects incurred by hierarchical WRs comes from the attribution theory (Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1980), which states that people attempt to understand other's behavior by attributing artificial feelings, beliefs, and intentions onto them. Employees experiencing negative outcomes from coworkers who also happen to be involved in a WR may attribute the negative outcome to that peer's involvement in the WR. Because a supervisor is more likely to negatively impact an employee's day than a coworker is, negative outcomes are more likely to be attributed to hierarchical WRs than to lateral ones. This explanation is also supported by the confirmatory bias phenomenon, which states that people have a tendency to perceive things that they expect to. Following these theories, Shapiro and Kirkman (2001) proposed a theory and model of anticipatory injustice that identifies the relationship the identities present in a WR and the attitudinal and behavioral responses to that WR to be mediated by coworker evaluations of the WR. They explain that employees will expect unfair workplace outcomes (distributive injustice), personal treatment (interpersonal injustice), and/or decision-making processes (procedural injustice). Furthermore, they explain that levels of anticipatory injustice increase with a concurrent increase of organizational change, and that employees perceiving one type of injustice have an increased likelihood of anticipating other types as well.

Under the assumption that uninvolved coworkers have part of the blame, it is still clear to see how the negative outcomes produced outweigh the positives. When coworkers form these negative attitudes and judgment towards the relationship, they damage the quality of their organization's group cohesion and interpersonal interaction, which leads to a digression of organizational communication, and decreased job productivity and job satisfaction (Hamill et al., 1980; Kahneman & Miller, 1986). Besides these outcomes, negative peer perceptions are still

dangerous for workplace outcomes because employees have a tendency to make observations of organizational group members and then project that observation as a perceived norm onto the whole group. This negative projection and lowering of the group norm will impact any organization on an individual basis (decreased job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment) as well the group as a whole (decreased organizational citizenship behavior [OCB] and cooperation, as well as increased turnover) (Alder & Quist, 2014).

Whether provided by those in the relationship or by those negative employee judgments, hierarchical WRs are fundamentally damaging to the workplaces they are in. At their core, these relationships present their coworkers with a central injustice (Mainiero, 1986); when coworkers are unable to participate in rewarding behavior presented to some. Along the same lines, hierarchical WRs, by definition, do not agree with two (consistency & bias-suppression) of the six factors presented in Leventhal's (1980) model of procedural justice. Consistency states that organizational allocation procedures should remain consistent from person to person, which is directly violated the supervisor is eliciting relationship behavior with one employee and not others. Bias-suppression explains that personal self-interest and unsupported preconceptions should be absent throughout the decision making process, which again is broken by hierarchical WRs when the decision-maker in the organizational holds such obvious self-interest towards one employee in particular over another. Employees respond to experiencing these breaches in procedural justice due to a hierarchical WR in their workplace by eliciting increased levels of incivility and negative perceptions (Jones, 1999; Quinn, 1977). Due to these reasons, we hypothesize:

H3: Individuals within hierarchical workplace romances will be a) perceived as more of a problem for the organization, b) rated as less competent, and c) given more severe organizational actions

CHAPTER I

METHODS

Participants

Study participants consisted of 544 employees working at least 30 hours a week (M = 39 hours, SD = 8.29). The original sample size was 998 participants, but was reduced to 544 due to failed manipulation checks. Participants were recruited online via Amazon's mechanical Turk. In order to participate in the survey, respondents had to be currently employed at least 30 hours a week, citizens of the United States, and at least 18 years of age. All participants were informed prior to participation that a) their participation is voluntary and can be retracted at any time; b) their responses would be recorded and analyzed anonymously; and c) that their responses would be utilized solely for the purposes of research. The final sample of participants were diverse in regards to age (18-77; M = 34.03 years, SD = 10.23), gender (65% female), ethnicity (72% White, 9% Black, 6% Asian-American, 6% Latin American, and 7% '*other*'), and time spent at their company (M = 5.3 years, SD = 5.34). In regards to relationship demographics, fifty-five percent were unmarried, thirty-seven percent were married, and 8 percent were divorced. Eighty-seven percent were heterosexual, 7 percent were homosexual, and 6 percent were bisexual.

Procedure

An experimental, between-subjects survey design was used. In order to distribute and collect data from our survey online, it was created through Qualtrics; an online tool used to create surveys. In order to refrain from using a geographic or convenience sample, participants were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which is an online recruitment tool that pays participants for completing surveys. In order to gather measures for people's observations of various WRs, we implemented a policy-capturing methodology by constructing

36 different conditions in the form of vignettes in order to predict the overall tendencies aggregated across our sample (Aiman-Smith, Scullen, & Barr, 2002). In order to control for any extraneous variables beyond our targeted race, gender, and organizational status, each vignette described a WR comprised of two hypothetical OPs ('*Jordan*' and '*Jesse*'); each of whose race (Black or White), sex (male or female), and power dynamic (coworker relationship or supervisor/subordinate relationship) was given (see Appendix). Each participant viewed only one vignette and rated both '*Jordan*' and '*Jesse*' on the same measures for our study variables. The survey also included respondents' demographics.

Measures

Overall perception of targets. Respondents' overall perceptions of the proposed WR dyad were assessed using an item adapted from Barratt and Nordstrom's (2011) measure of impact on the work environment. The item is as follows "How serious of a problem do you believe the relationship represents for the organization?" Responses measured negativity effect, ranging from 1 (major negative effect) to 7 (major positive effect).

Perceived competence. Respondents' perceptions of OP competence as a result of participating in a WR were assessed using 6 items ($\alpha = 9.51$) adapted from Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu's (2002) measure on competence perceptions in the workplace. These scales asked respondents to rate the extent to which the proposed individuals (*Jordan* and *Jesse* individually) would display the following attributes; competence, confidence, capability, efficiency, intelligence, and skillfulness. Responses measured competency scores, ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Extremely).

Preferred action and perceived fairness. Respondent's individual perceptions of the targets engaging in the proposed WR as they pertain to preferred action were collected using 6

items ($\alpha = 9.85$) adapted from Karl and Sutton's (2000) measure of perceived fairness of workplace romance policies. Each item asked respondents to rate how fair a proposed organizational policy would be if it were applied to Jordan and Jesse's WR (1 = extremely unfair to 9 = extremely fair). The six organizational policies were 'no action', verbal reprimand, written warning, counseling, transfer, and termination.

Demographics. To collect demographic data on our participants, we asked them to report their occupation, job level, hours of work per week, and years worked in their organization. We also asked them their education level, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, marital status, and religious identity.

CHAPTER II

RESULTS

Our three-part hypothesis states that (H1) interracial, (H2) same-sex, and (H3) hierarchical workplace romances will be (a) perceived more negatively for the organization, (b) perceived as less competent, and (c) be treated with more severe organizational actions than (H1) same-race, (H2) heterosexual, and (H3) lateral workplace romances. Tables 1-3 contains means, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients for the target variable. To test H1-H3, we calculated t-tests for each on our three study variables (see Tables 1-3). There was no significant differences in workplace outcomes for interracial and same-race relationships, including problem level scores (Interracial - M = 3.72, SD = .95; M = 3.73, SD = .98; Same-race - $t(543) = -0.14$, $p > .05$), competence ratings (Interracial - M = 3.54, SD = .767; Same-race - M = 3.47, SD = .795; $t(543) = 1.00$, $p > .05$), or preferred organizational action (Interracial - M = 3.58, SD = 1.8; Same-race - M = 3.7, SD = 1.78; $t(543) = -0.79$, $p > .05$). Thus, hypothesis (1) regarding interracial workplace romances was not supported.

There was no significant differences in workplace outcomes for same-sex and heterosexual relationships, including problem level scores (Same-sex - M = 3.74, SD = 1.06; Heterosexual - M = 3.71, SD = .893; $t(543) = 0.36$, $p > .05$), competence ratings (Same-sex - M = 3.53, SD = .804; Heterosexual - M = 3.47, SD = .765; $t(543) = 0.93$, $p > .05$), or preferred organizational action (Same-sex - M = 3.55, SD = 1.83; Heterosexual - M = 3.73, SD = 1.75; $t(543) = -1.15$, $p > .05$). Thus, hypothesis (2) regarding same-sex workplace romances was not supported.

There was no significant differences in workplace outcomes for hierarchical and lateral relationships on competence ratings (Hierarchical - M = 3.44, SD = .81; Lateral - M = 3.56, SD =

.751; $t(543) = -1.86$, $p > .05$) Thus, hypothesis (3b) hierarchical workplace romances was not supported. However, there was a significant difference in the problem level scores for hierarchical WR ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.04$) and lateral WR ($M = 3.82$, $SD = .896$) conditions; $t(543) = -2.37$, $p < .05$, as well as a significant difference in the preferred organizational action for hierarchical WR ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.79$) and lateral WR ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.65$) conditions; $t(543) = 6.6$, $p < .05$. Therefore, hypotheses (3a) and (3b) regarding hierarchical workplace romances were supported.

CHAPTER III

DISCUSSION

Our significant findings support existing literature. Mainiero (1986) states that hierarchical WRs are the most dangerous for workplace functioning and there is resounding evidence to support their claim (Anderson & Hunsaker, 1985; Karl & Sutton, 2000; Pierce & Aguinis, 1997; Powell, 2001;). Brown and Allgeier (1996) state that hierarchical workplace romances are less tolerated by employees and more disruptive to organizational well being than are lateral WRs. This could be due to the implicit power difference exhibited in these relationships. Mainiero's (1986) model of power dynamics in WRs states that romantic partners exchange resources. Coworkers fear that the person with more power may use it to exploit career resources in exchange for personal benefit. This fear could also be elicited by the fact that the person of power also holds this power over other employees and, in turn, their involvement in a WR has the potential to adversely impact a greater number of people that a mere coworker.

Seeing as these hierarchical WRs are perceived as more of a problem for workplace outcomes, it follows that OPs would seek more severe organizational actions be taken against them. As previously discussed, Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1962) can be used to explain this finding. The increase in perceived problem level attributed to hierarchical WRs in our analysis implies that the conflict manifested by them is more salient; thus, employees will act with greater drive to reduce it. The support for these two findings also has implications for why H3b was not supported. If employees perceive a greater problem level and seek more severe action when supervisors are involved in WRs, something can be said for perceived competence. Attribution theory (Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1980) supports the claim that employees perceive supervisors as competent by explaining that individuals attempt to determine the causes behind

events in their environment. Using this reasoning, employees may perceive their supervisors to be competent as justification for their title. This logic supports our findings in that hierarchical WRs are perceived and treated more negatively and yet are still perceived as competent as lateral WRs.

While there is ample literature available on hierarchical WRs to compare our findings to, there is a disparate lack of research on the effects of interracial or same-sex WRs to compare our first two hypotheses to. This revelation speaks to the need for research on intersectional WRs. Without other research to compare with, our lack of findings is mostly attributed to our study's limitations. Due to the vignette design of our experimental survey, it was essential for our participants to notice the race, sex, and position of our two proposed coworkers so that they could respond accurately to the perception measures. We included an attention check in our survey after the measures of perception and found that nearly half of the participants in our sample incorrectly identified the race and sex of *Jordan* and *Jesse*. Because our study involved a policy capturing approach, it was essential that our participants noticed the manipulations made to *Jordan* and *Jesse*'s races, sexes, and organizational positions. Our analysis was based on employee perceptions of intersectional WRs and, without noticing the manipulation, our participants were responding to our measures with some other WR in mind. Based on the nature of stigma and minority populations, we can assume that participants who did not pass the attention checks were answering our measures with a same-race, heterosexual, lateral WR in mind.

Regardless of whether or not our vignette manipulations were noticed by our participants, our survey design itself implicates limitations in the form of social desirability responding (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). This theory states that in cases of self-reporting, people want to

show the best version of themselves and subconsciously deemphasize their negative attributes. Seeing as society today is moving towards acceptance (Bobo, 1998), perceptions of discrimination and unfavorable attitudes toward stigmatized populations are seen negative; therefore, respondents holding these perceptions and attitudes would not fully admit to possessing them. Even then, the implications and perceptions of a WR on workplace functioning are case-by-case bases. We instructed our participants to envision our proposed WR in their own organization. Because of this, we had no way to control for the environment in which our proposed WR was taking place.

All of these limitations considered, it is safe to say that further research focusing on the perceptions of intersectional WRs should utilize field experiments to avoid self-reporting, and should correct for as much case bias as possible. Our limitations and lack of statistical support taken into account, our data still shows resounding support for the claim that WRs are generally perceived negatively in the workplace. One can see that negative perceptions of each WR were pervasive regardless of the individuals involved in it. Only in the case of hierarchical WRs, where inherent power imbalances implicated salient conflict for employees, was the problem level and preferred severity of actions statistically significant. Drawing on Shapiro and Kirkman's (2001) model of anticipatory injustice, we theorize that our lack of statistical support was present due to employee perceptions and not to the study's limitation. This theory states that employees expecting injustice will, in turn, perceive it to have manifested. Using this rationale, we posit that employees may perceive more negative outcomes from WRs simply by expecting them to do such. The bad name that WRs have brought on are now causing employees to negatively categorize WRs before actually assessing who it is involved in it, and what they actually implicate for workplace outcomes. Because of this, future research should focus on

employees' attitudes towards WRs and analyze how this attitude may undermine perceptions of negative outcomes. Additionally, future research should strive to record the implications and organizational outcomes of (a) interracial and/or (b) same-sex WRs. In order to do this, we believe utilizing field-based methods would prove to be the most beneficial way to collect data. In this way, the research moves away from drawing conclusions when social desirability responding may be an issue. In addition to this, we suggest gathering qualitative data so that key findings manifest themselves in the data as opposed to having premeditated hypotheses and findings.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Workplace romances are increasing in prevalence and are negatively perceived overall for interpersonal and workplace outcomes by organizational peers. Stigmatized employees (Black, homosexual, etc.) are still discriminated against in the workplace. By using Festinger's (1962) cognitive dissonance theory as a reference, we explained how these negative perceptions of stigmatized individuals have the potential to exacerbate the existing negative perceptions of WRs. Our three-part hypothesis posited that interracial, same-sex, and hierarchical workplace romances will be (a) perceived more negatively for the organization, (b) perceived as less competent, and (c) be treated with more severe organizational actions than their same-race, heterosexual, and lateral workplace romance counterparts. In order to test this phenomenon, we created an experimentally designed survey and recruited employed participants (n = 544) using MTurk. Our findings did not support H1, H2, or H3b; however, we did find significant statistical support that hierarchical WRs are (a) perceived as more of a problem for organizational outcomes and (c) treated with more severe organizational actions.

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Vignette:

"Think of the organization you currently work in. You learn that two co-workers have begun dating. Jordan is a [White/Black] [male/female] employee and Jesse is a [White/Black] [male/female] [coworker/supervisor]. Please respond to the following items based on your feelings about the workplace romance:"

Table 1

T-test: Interracial & Same-race WRs on a) problem level, b) perceived competence, and c) preferred action

	Interracial		Same-race		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
A) Problem Level	3.72	0.957	3.73	0.986	-0.14
B) Perceived Competence	3.54	0.767	3.47	0.795	1
C) Preferred Action	3.58	1.8	3.7	1.78	-0.79

**p*< .05.

Note. M = Mean; *S*D = Standard Deviation.

Table 2

T-test: Interracial & Same-race WRs on a) problem level, b) perceived competence, and c) preferred action

	Interracial		Same-race		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
A) Problem Level	3.72	0.957	3.73	0.986	-0.14
B) Perceived Competence	3.54	0.767	3.47	0.795	1
C) Preferred Action	3.58	1.8	3.7	1.78	-0.79

*$p < .05$.

Note. M = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation.

Table 3

T-test: Hierarchical & Lateral WRs on a) problem level, b) perceived competence, and c) preferred action

	Hierarchical		Lateral		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
A) Problem Level	3.62	1.04	3.82	0.896	-2.37*
B) Perceived Competence	3.44	0.81	3.56	0.751	-1.86
C) Preferred Action	4.14	1.79	3.17	1.65	6.6*

*$p < .05$.

Note. M = Mean; *SD* = Standard Deviation.